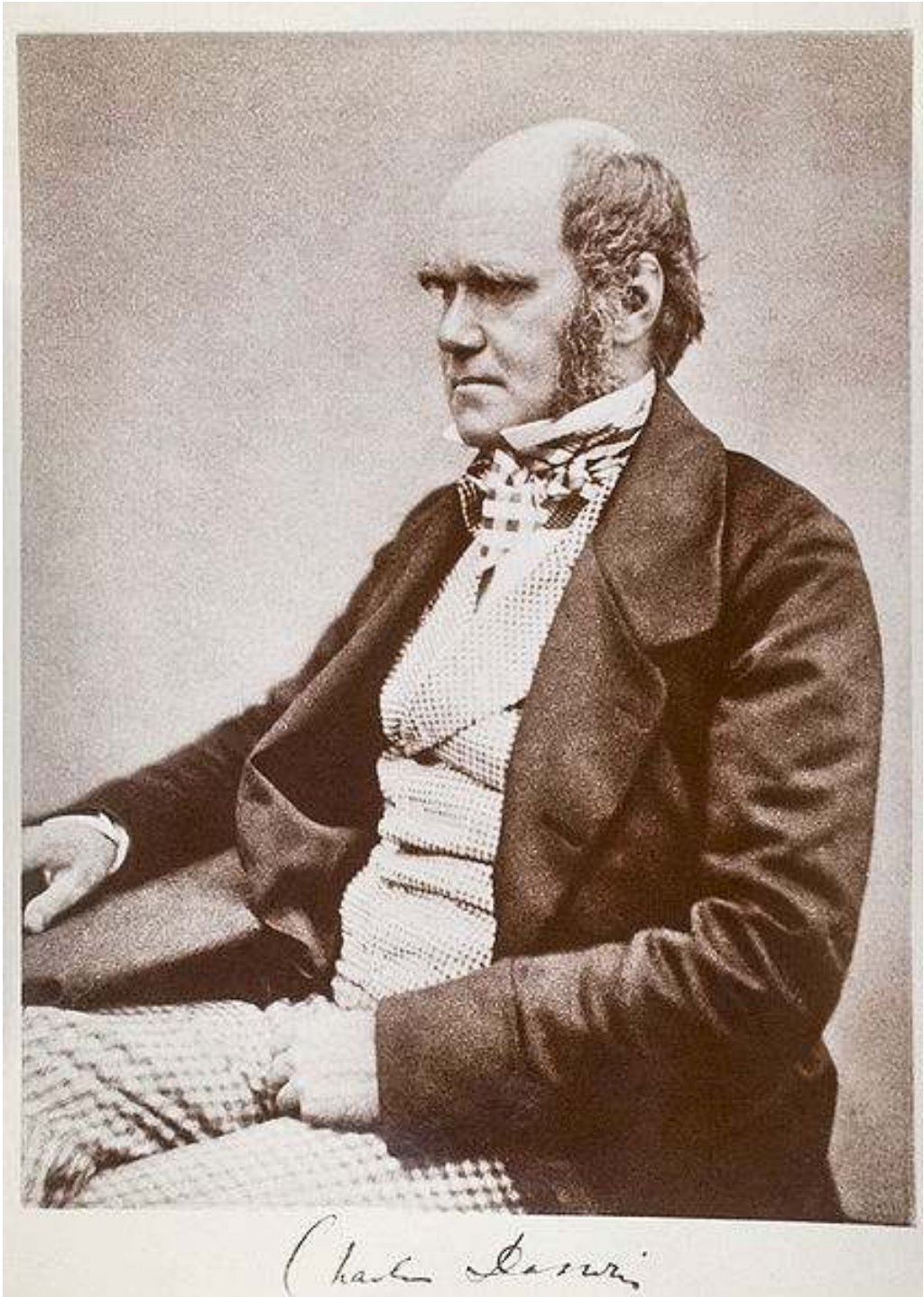# Canonical Link Element

Matt Cutts
Google Engineer
Thursday, Feb. 12, 2009

Interesting Fact

- Charles Darwin was born 200 year ago today: February 12, 1809

How can we help the web "evolve"?

Duplicate Content

These URLs are all different:
- www.example.com
- example.com
- www.example.com/
- example.com/
- www.example.com/index.html
- example.com/index.html
- www.example.com/Home.aspx
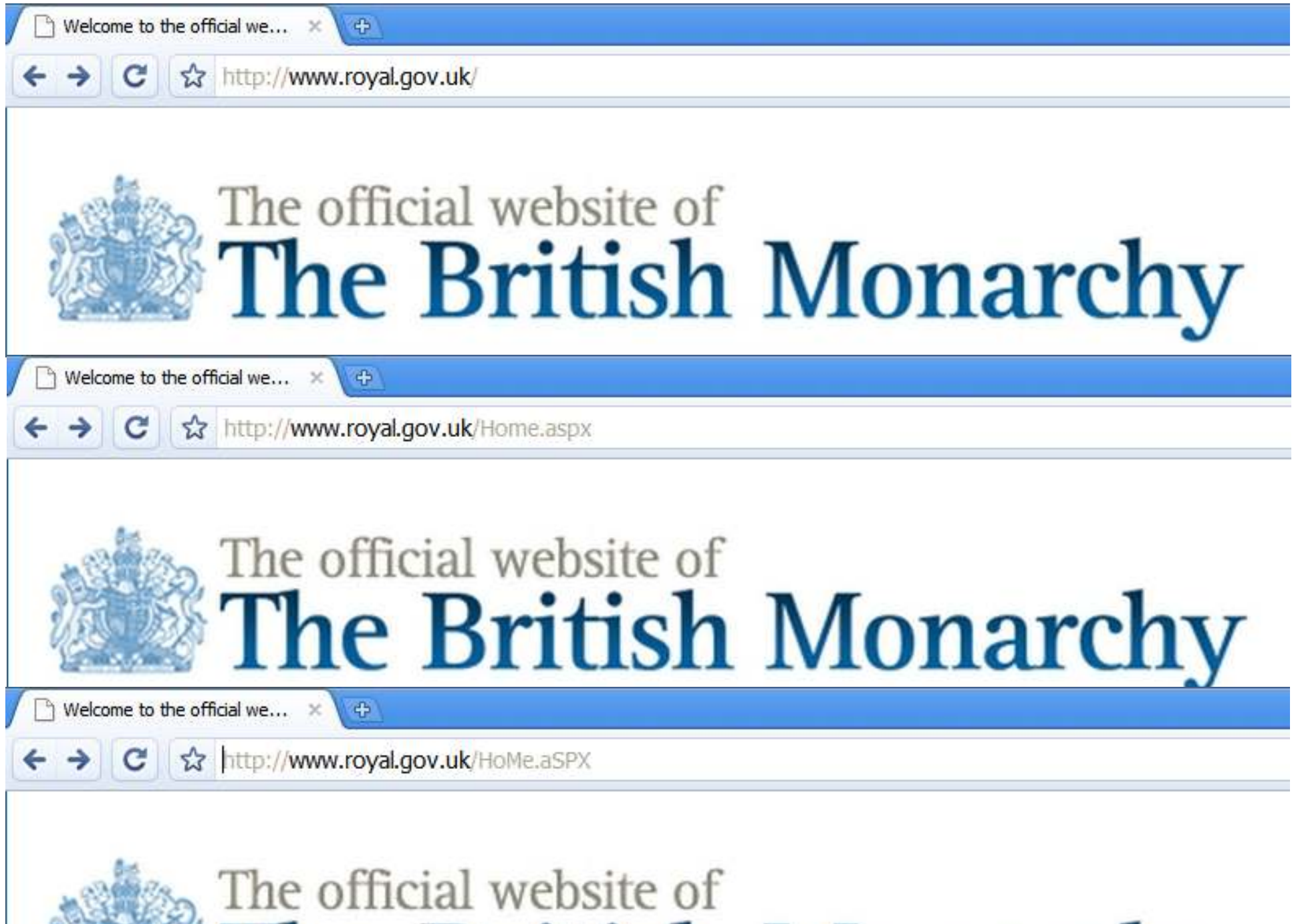- example.com/Home.aspx

How to fix duplicate content issues?

- Change your Content Management System (CMS) to generate only the urls you want. "Normalize" urls
- Pick one "canonical" url and ensure you link consistently within your site
- Make all the non-canonical urls do a permanent (301) HTTP redirect to the canonical/preferred url
- Google's Webmaster Tools: specify www vs. non-www
- Break ties in Google by submitting your preferred url in a sitemaps file

Tough Duplicate Content Issues

- Sometimes can't generate permanent/301 redirects
- Can't help how people link to you
- Uppercase/lowercase paths
- Session IDs
- Tracking codes, analytics, and landing pages
- Sorting by ascending vs. descending
- Breadcrumbs (the user's previous web page)

Is this a common problem? Yes!

New Option for Duplicate Content
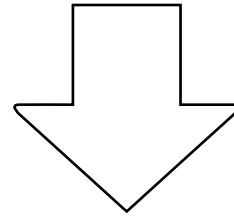
Canonical Link Element at page level

On http://www.example.com/page.html?sid=asdf314159265

```
<head>
...
<link rel="canonical" href="http://example.com/page.html"/>
...
</head>
```

(Don't forget the final / at the end of the link tag.)

High-order Bits

- This is a **hint**, not a directive/mandate/requirement. Search engines choose when to use the suggestion
- Far better to avoid dupes and normalize urls in the first place
- If you're a power user, exhaust alternatives first
- Be careful. Regular bloggers/websites may want to wait for their software to be updated
- If we see abuse, we reserve the right to react as needed

Questions and Answers

Q: Does this work across domains?
A: No, only on the same domain

Q: Does this work across subdomains/hosts?
A: Yes. So zeta.zappos.com could suggest www.zappos.com as a canonical url

Q: Can I use this to suggest http://example.com be the canonical url instead of https://example.com?
A: Yes, absolutely

Q: What's the difference between this and a 301/perm redirect?
A: They are very similar, but sometimes you don't have the easy ability to generate 301/permanent HTTP redirects

Questions and Answers

Q: Do the pages have to be bit-for-bit identical?
A: No, but they should be similar. Slight differences are okay

Q: Can I use relative or absolute urls?
A: Yes, but we highly suggest that you use absolute urls. This is a powerful tool, and absolute urls leave less room for error

Q: Can you follow a chain of canonicals?
A: We may, but don't count on it. Point directly to the final url

Questions and Answers

Q: What if I point to a 404? Or have an infinite loop? Or I point to an uncrawled url? Or www/non-www conflict?
A: Search engines will handle it as best we can. Don't cross the streams!

Thanks

- Joachim Kupke: Google engineer who did heavy lifting
- Yahoo and Microsoft: for support of this link element too
- Wikia: for trying this out on their wiki pages
- Lots of webmasters for giving us feedback on this

Resources

Blog post on Google webmaster blog:
http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2009/02/specify-your-canonical.html

Yahoo blog post: http://ysearchblog.com/2009/02/12/fighting-duplication-adding-more-arrows-to-your-quiver/

Microsoft: http://blogs.msdn.com/webmaster/archive/2009/02/12/partnering-to-help-solve-duplicate-content-issues.aspx

Ask: http://blog.ask.com/2009/02/ask-is-going-canonical.html

Google Help Center documentation:
http://google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=139394

Joost de Valk: WordPress, Magento, and Drupal
http://yoast.com/canonical-url-links/